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Celebrating Reconciliation

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1. The Mystery of Sin

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults — the new rite for receiving adults into the church — has received a lot of attention in the past few years. But a parallel process for introducing adult Catholics to the sacrament of Penance in its new form is an even more urgent need.

The new rite for receiving adults into the church describes the steps by which someone is brought to faith in Christ and to membership of the church for the first time — "becoming a convert," as we used to say.

But it is by different steps that we are led to "reconversion," after we fail in living the Christian life.

The new rite of Reconciliation (as Penance or Confession is now called) was published, along with a 16-page introduction, in 1974. It describes the process of turning back to one's first Christian commitment; and it provides the framework within which that return can take place.

Whether we are cradle-Catholics or have become Catholics as adults, it is a puzzle to us — and a disappointment — that sin and failure continue to dog our steps, even after what seemed the most profound religious conversion. As the preface to the new rite puts it: "Because of human weakness, Christians turn aside from their early love and even break off their friendship with God by sinning."

Some understanding of this mystery of sin is of vital importance for our survival as Christians; we need to know how God usually leads the Christian through this labyrinth. Although the path may not seem very clear to someone looking at his own life, the process of conversion is well-mapped already.

To say that sin is the great obstacle to being a Christian may seem a

platitude. But its truth becomes sharper if we say that not knowing how to deal with one's personal failures is what ham-strings most of us. Yet the existence of the sacrament of Penance itself states the normality of this need for second or even repeated conversion.

To this, the new rite of Reconciliation adds a deeper understanding of how this reconversion takes place, and the steps by which it is achieved.

A thorough assimilation of what this new rite contains seems to me the key point for a renewal of Catholic Christian life. There are now two generations of young adults who have grown up during the period of uncertainty about confessional practice, who lack the specific Christian skills of knowing how to repent, or where.

Even older generations, who put so much into implementing the reforms of Vatican II, are travel-weary, puzzled that such great effort has not been more fruitful in their own lives as well as in the church generally.

Probably priests themselves have suffered as much as anyone during these years, in not knowing how to guide their people through this experience of failure and sin.

It will require considerable courage on the part of both priests and people to accept that all the ingredients given in the new rite of Reconciliation are really necessary and normal parts of this dark journey and of its sacramental celebration.

At present, the option of face-to-face confession seems to be the only noticeable change in sacramental practice. Few of the other significant elements in the new rite seem to be used much. But they won't come into use at all until we discover that they are not truly optional; that they are instead the principal milestones on the way.

Two of these elements might be mentioned: the reading from scripture, which is recommended even in celebrating the simplest form of the sacrament (the confession of a single individual), and the new formula of absolution, without abbreviation, along with the other accompanying prayers.

For the moment, let us confine ourselves to the point of the scripture reading. I am not offering practical advice as to how this should be done, but merely considering the reason why it should be done at all.

The selection of scripture readings given in some recently published "confessional aids" tends to suggest that the scripture reading is an alternative basis for examining one's conscience, in place of the Ten Commandments and the previous "lists" of sins.

But isolating and identifying particular types of evil behaviour is not what matter most. The mystery of sin is itself what troubles man, and this is what we cannot plumb without God's special help. The greatest of all traps is to imagine that sin can be easily recognized.

True enough, we may have a general sense that things are not well; but on our own we cannot see that a rejection of God is at the heart of this evil. The sin-dimension of evil, rather than a psychological account of our motives or an ethical analysis of our duties, is what must be revealed to us by the word of God and by the Holy Spirit.

If the notion of sin is not credible, then neither is the notion of redemption, nor is Christianity. We are always in danger of trying to diagnose our own sickness, and of giving to our personal hurts and disappointments a theological importance they do not deserve.

"Through the word of God, the Christian receives light to recognize his sin and is called to conversion and to confidence in God's mercy." (Introduction, 17). The word of God, especially as it is heard within the celebration of this sacrament, has itself a power to reveal to us our true condition.

By that I don't necessarily mean our utter badness. It's more a case of God's word conveying some insight into what God has made by his word, our place in the world created by his word, a sense of the goodness of what he has made, even in making me.

We probably have a long way to go before our reading of the scripture within the sacrament of Reconciliation conveys the confidence of our belief that it is God's word that made us, God's word that calls us back to him now, and God's word that proclaims our forgiveness.

The formula of absolution had worked itself loose from its mooring, as an excerpt from the many words God has spoken. Without lessening the stature of the words of absolution as one of the most solemn proclamations of the word of God, we must become much more aware of the effectiveness of the other parts of the word proclaimed within the sacramental rite.

Confession suffered from the same flaw that affected our attitude to the Mass: we tried to pin it down to the "essential word," so that everything else at once became non-essential, and therefore non-effective.

Within the sacrament of Reconciliation, the scripture reading needs to be allowed once more to exercise its true role. The sacrament is from start to finish an experience of the church proclaiming the forgiving word of God. Baptism gives life to the dead; Reconciliation restores a lost friendship.

In talking of Confession, we are not dealing with the sins of mankind in general; we are dealing explicitly with Catholics, and with the sacrament by which Christ in the church restores us to himself.

Some people would react to that statement by saying that if it's all as parochial as that, then they are not really interested. The evils in the world — war, injustice and the rest — alone seem significant enough to merit their attention.

Scripture certainly does not condone those evils, but Christ looks on them with other eyes than ours, and he often points to the heart of the evil elsewhere than we would look. The solution he proclaims is the crucifixion, the resurrection and his coming — elements not easily pushed into the mould of programmes for social reform or even of New Year resolutions.

God's word indeed blows where it will. Its unpredictability unsteadies us, even the unpredictability of the solution it offers to the problem of sin.

On the other hand, steering Catholics away from an infatuation with sin seems to be the main effect of the reforms in the sacrament of Penance. All of us get puzzled by the fact that we fail so miserably, and do so hard on the heels of our most sincere proclamations of religious commitment. We can't but be dismayed, wondering why we do it.

Yet the excessive desire to understand why we commit wrong can itself hook us, fostering an obsession with the problem of evil. Not only can this produce scruples, but it can start to seem reasonable and good to loiter in the environment of evil. Like Faust and the old alchemists, we convince ourselves that closer examination, or more will-power, might crack the mystery of evil.

But "he who would sup with the devil must use a long spoon." The problem is indeed that sin is a mystery, and mankind can deal with it only with the tools God gives us. The commonest source of human tragedy is in our attempts to deal with it barehanded.

Some, even Catholics, have an attitude of scorn for Confession, implying that it is just a refuge for weaklings who cannot cope with their own defects. This both underestimates the real mysteriousness of man's sin, and sets aside the main armour Christ has given us.

In brief, the core of our defence is that Christ has in his body overcome sin. And strong though our antipathy to the notion may be, it is from the church, within this body of fellow-Catholics, men and women, that this strength flows.

It is through the voice of men who are themselves flawed and unpromising that the proclamation is made that sin has been conquered and is no more, and that we are again at one with our Lord.

Self-reliance may seem an admirable human quality. But it can be used as a cloak to hide our reluctance to accept that what is first required of the Christian is faith — reliance on what God says, because he says it. Reliance on his word, which succeeds in what he has sent it to do.

2. The Grief of Sin

It may seem high-handed and un-ecumenical to say so, but in writing about the sacrament of Reconciliation I am necessarily thinking in terms of Catholics. The sacrament of Penance is the specific way in which we members of the Catholic Church deal with the problem of sin in our lives.

The presence of sin within the church has always been a source of scandal to us. By that, I am not just referring to the bad impression we may make on outsiders. What upsets us is that within so short a time after we have been sincerely attentive to God, we find ourselves wholly attracted elsewhere.

From the earliest days of Christianity, various Christian sects have tried to overcome this problem with the theory that real Christians cannot sin anymore; and if by chance it turned out that failure subsequently occurs, this would be taken as evidence that one never was one of the elite.

The longing to be impeccable is itself only a variation of the desire "to be like gods." (Genesis 3:5)

But the real source of the mystery about sin is that, like the cockle and the wheat, it can co-exist with grace within the people of God, individually or collectively. The heretical stance is to imagine that the Christian can, with utter finality, dissociate himself from evil on this side of the grave.

A surprising feature of repentance, or *metanoia,* as described in the new rite of Reconcilialtion, is that it is an on-going process: "*Metanoia* is a profound change of the whole person, by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God made manifest in his Son." (Introduction, 6)

Or again, "After receiving pardon for his sins...the penitent continues his conversion, and expresses it in a life renewed according to the gospel." (Introduction, 20)

This leads us back to a somewhat overlooked fact about contrition or penitence: that it is itself a virtue, a thoroughly Christian virtue. It is not just a single act performed when we go to confession, to get us back to the base-line in regard to moral behaviour.

It's not enough, even, to think of it as one of our regular daily prayers, with resolutions for an improved future.

As a virtue, penitence is central to being a Christian — especially in contrast to being a Stoic or a Pelagian. And as a Christian virtue, it is a disposition of heart which grows in proportion to our holiness.

Saints need it as well as sinners; for it is not just the quality by which we get our first push into the life of grace. It is the virtue by which we survive and grow, though temptation and even sin remain part of the fabric of our lives.

As patience is the virtue by which we cope with the evil of suffering in our human life, so penitence deals with sin, with our separation from God. A physically disabled person may reach a stage where he gets an enormous amount out of life, but obviously his disability will still cause sadness and pain. Patience is the virtue which lets him over-ride these privations, and remain truly human in a situation which almost seems sure of destroying the human qualities of life.

Penitence has a similar sense of grief with regard to sin. We may not often be conscious of it, but every so often it dawns on each one of us how much has been given us by God, and how we have squandered it: God's friendship, Christ's presence, the community of the church, our own personal vocation and grace.

No amount of striving on our part will totally eliminate either human pain or human sin during our mortal lives. It is rather unhelpful, therefore, to give the impression that just another dash of effort would have eliminated sin.

The early Christian book, *The Didache,* has a charming note at the end of its section on morality: "If you can shoulder the Lord's yoke in its entirety, then you will be perfect. But if that is too much for you, do as much as you can."

God's grace truly does heal us, but gradually. The damaged covenant is part of the pain we must live with, as we must learn to live with the cruelly mangled body of the crucified Lord. Belief in the resurrection must not make us ignore the reality of our Lord's passion. The splendour of God's presence in us, his grace, must not lead us to deny that we drift from his presence, or even struggle to be free of it.

A fundamental aspect of Catholic teaching is that none of us is capable of being virtuous on our own, without the aid of Christ's redeeming grace. Everyone, even those whose conduct may seem to us to be untroubled by temperamental weakness, needs the virtue of repentance.

Spectacular wickedness is not necessarily what it's about; rather, the inclination to separate ourselves from God, to cut loose and go our own way, is a universal temptation — even for people who have already publicly committed themselves to a Christian way of life by becoming a member of the church.

The essence of temptation lies, as St Thomas Aquinas suggests, in the attractiveness that a created good can have for our human will, even when it introduces disorder into our lives.

This is an obvious enough truth when applied to human desires like anger or gluttony or lustfulness. It's harder to acknowledge that an indifference to God can develop just as readily in someone whose performance is well under control.

But the virtue of penitence is needed as a permanent check even in those who have come to a stage of being mature and virtuous. For the most attractive of "created goods" to any of us is that our own achievements or personal performance seem satisfactory.

We must not, of course, induce scrupulosity by excessive analysis of our own motivation; but penitence keeps us aware of how easy it is for us to slip, and how frequently we have done just that in the past!

If there is to be real spiritual growth, we must come to recognize penitence as a plausible virtue for everyone, at every level of the Christian life. Conversion or repentance is a permanent substratum in being a Christian. But we need delicacy, so that our rhetoric doesn't distort the nature of sin; and we need firmness, so that we don't trivialize it.

The new rite gives ten sample "acts of contrition" or, as they are now called, "prayers of the penitent." In accordance with the directive in the Introduction (19), most of these are based on the words of scripture, or are simply verses from the psalms or the gospels.

Of special interest is the fact that, apart from our traditional Act of Contrition, all the other examples are in the form of prayers, rather than statements or resolutions (such as "I have sinned, I am sorry, I will not sin again...") One of the new prayers goes as follows:

Lord Jesus
you opened the eyes of the blind,
healed the sick,
forgave the sinful woman,
and after Peter's denial confirmed him in your love.
Listen to my prayer:
forgive me all my sins,
renew your love in my heart,
help me to live in perfect unity with my fellow Christians,
that I may proclaim your saving power to all the world.

These prayers point to an important aspect of contrition which might otherwise escape us. Contrition is itself a gift, a grace of the Holy Spirit. In traditional language, it is an "infused virtue."

"The follower of Christ who has sinned but who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the sacrament of Penance should above all be converted to God with his whole heart." (Introduction, 6)

What is of special importance for a Catholic in this regard is our understanding of the church as the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit." This means that the church possesses the Spirit, and in turn it is the church that gives us the spirit of repentance.

The Holy Spirit enables us to see how the pattern of failure and revival is the shape of the Christian life — death and resurrection, weakness and strength. It is this that makes penitence a virtue, with a permanent place in the Christian life.

The fact that one has resolved to make a new start would not establish penitence as a separate virtue. What makes it a specifically Christian quality is this connexion with our Lord's death and weakness which he endured, and saw changed into glory.

This enlightenment by the Holy Spirit always comes to us, however, through the action of our fellow-Christians. It is they who become the (usually unconscious) channels of the Holy Spirit.

Most often it is when we are at Mass together, or talking together, that another's insight into the meaning of the death and resurrection sets off a spark in our own mind, and we see for a moment how it makes sense.

So, too, with their example and behaviour; they enable us to catch an outline of the Christian way which we are travelling together; and even when at times we stumble, it is the steadfastness of these others that continues to assert for us that the way is worth following.

As the Introduction puts it: "The *whole* church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord." (8)

Yet in the end it is well to remember that even with true Christian contrition, we shall still have a lot of inner uncertainty about what has really gone wrong. Total moral clarity about the past or the future is a rare gift. More commonly, the Spirit leads us only a very little way at a time.

3. The Tale of Sin

A severe source of tension in the life of a Catholic must surely be that our own sin is something we are not normally allowed to talk about. And yet, without any practice, we are expected to do just that within the unnerving formality of confession.

In groups like *Alcoholics Anonymous,* by contrast, telling the tale of one's lapses and recovery is the normal means of assisting others to recognize and admit their own weakness.

Moral theology does of course talk about sin, but there is about it a hint that these things aren't what a Catholic would happen to do. "Let not such things be mentioned among you." It is a pity that we have followed this one directive of St Paul's so strictly. *Sinners Anonymous* might convey more accurately what we are, rather than the title of Roman Catholics.

"Confession requires the will to open one's heart to the minister of God." (Introduction to the Rite of Reconciliation, 6)

Church documents such as the introductions to the various new rites of the sacraments don't often contain explicit correctives to some likely misuse of the sacrament. It is surprising therefore to find this statement about confession: "This is not a mere ritual repetition or a psychological exercise." (Introduction, 76)

The confessional, especially when the priest and penitent sit face-to-face in a reconciliation room, can quite easily be turned into a sort of psychotherapy session. The absence of rituals may prompt the penitent into chatting about all sorts of topics which, though connected with religion, are not appropriate here.

The externals of an "open confessional" are so similar to those of a

modern counselling session that it's difficult for the priest or the penitent not to slip into that mould.

The remark about confession not being a psychological exercise has yet another sting in its tail. We priests of the older generation are in fact likely to approve of the statement, while continuing to apply our bits of seminary textbook psychology to the practice of the sacraments.

It did not occur to me at first that the ban on psychologizing applies just as much to using Aristotle as to using Karl Rogers or Transactional Analysis!

In the matter of questioning the penitent, the directive of the Council of Trent has pointedly been omitted from the new rite. There is no mention of the priest questioning the penitent "in order to elicit any circumstances which would change the species of the sin." (Denzinger 899)

The priest is indeed to assist the penitent to make an "integral confession" or a "complete confession." (Introduction, 44, 18). But nowhere does the new rite say that this consists in listing the species and circumstances of sin. After a couple of centuries of the opposite practice, it is perhaps hinting that a too-detailed probing of the exact category and type of sin is not spiritually healthy.

"However, this inner examination of heart and the exterior accusation should be made in the light of God's mercy." (Introduction, 6).

More significant still is that the words "mortal sin" are not used anywhere in the introduction or in the rite itself. The words are in fact deliberately omitted from two quotations from the Council of Trent.

The term "grave sin" is used, but even this is used only twice, and the expression is never explained by reference to what was called "grave matter." Instead, the introduction says that "those who by grave sin have withdrawn from the communion of love with God are called back in the sacrament of penance to the life they have lost." (7)

The opening paragraphs of the new rite of Reconciliation described sin as "turning aside from one's early love." Grave sin is now defined as "breaking the communion of love." There is no attempt to equate this malice with some particular quantity of "grave matter."

The intricate debates about grave matter turned confessional practice

into a quagmire of casuistry in the last three centuries, and it still leads people to ask, "How far can I go without committing a mortal sin?" — in other words, "What constitutes 'grave matter' in this area of morality?"

The introduction and directives in the new rite have quietly laid this question aside.

The rite describes the priest as "leading the repentant sinner to the light of truth," to "a true knowledge of self before God," so that we may be brought back through the sacrament of penance to "the life we have lost" and to "the full freedom of the children of God."

What seems to be underlined throughout the introduction is the destructiveness of sin. Personal sin is something by which I destroy my true freedom and my true life.

A certain sort of examination of conscience can lead us to view sins almost as if they were themselves a positive achievement. A catalogue of sins can seem to give evil an independent existence. And our efforts to categorize our immorality can end up consuming all our moral energy.

But the sacrament of penance isn't really concerned with the painful analysis and the tangle of the circumstances which triggered off some bit of behaviour: "who, where, when, what, in which circmstances?" Neither the priest nor the penitent needs a psychologist's understanding of human defects.

In fact, too large an investment of attention on the descriptions of evil will almost certainly distract us from the particular element in our behaviour which makes it to be sin, a "turning away from our early love."

"In order to fulfil his ministry properly and faithfully, the confessor should understand the disorders of souls and apply the appropriate remedies to them." "For conversion should affect a person from within, so that it may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ." (Introduction 10, 6).

As I have said in a previous chapter, sin in a Catholic is theologically and spiritually different from the moral failures of one who has never been baptised or been a member of the church. The sacrament of

penance is "a serious striving to perfect the grace of baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us ever more clearly." (Introduction, 76)

So the deeper our sense of what baptism has done for us, the truer will be our sense of what sin is now doing.

The "disorders of souls" mentioned above refers not just to ethics or morality in general. In the sacrament of penance, on the one hand, we are concerned with the ways that certain kinds of behaviour are incompatible with living out our baptism; and on the other, we are celebrating Christ's victory over sin.

Quite simply, we are asserting that the various aspects of Christ's death and resurrection have special relevance and power to overcome evil within us.

A sample examination of conscience, given in an appendix at the end of the new rite, is worth studying. It illustrates very well the understanding of sin as explained in the introduction, and it goes some way towards giving us the language we need to talk about our sins as Catholics: to express realistically, though briefly, the way we see sin as diminishing our real freedom and the life given us in baptism.

In the long run, of course, *Alcoholics Anonymous* is not really the model for the sacrament of Reconciliation, any more than is psychotherapy. But the valid point of comparison is that to recognize our defects as men and women, and specifically as Catholics, we need to be given the words to speak about them — and that is what AA members do for each other.

The sample examination of conscience is a first step in an important new enterprise among Catholics, one that is every bit as significant as the change of the liturgy from Latin into English.

We have to find a language with which to talk about sin, so that the church-going Catholic can recognize where he is on the Christian way, and not just assume that he isn't even on the map.

Two extracts from the examination of conscience may illustrate my point: "In my family life, have I contributed to the well-being and happiness of the rest of the family, by patience and genuine love?" "Have I kept my senses and my whole body pure and chaste and a temple of the Holy Spirit consecrated for resurrection and glory, and as a sign of God's love for men and women?"

In the first example, the stress is on the virtue, and on envisaging what patience and love could have achieved. Only in the light of that contrast can we measure the negative force of our impatience or hostility to others.

The second example looks rather wordy and complicated. But it is proposing a starting-point for seeing the true basis for a Christian's attitude to the body. It is not exactly the language each of us would use in confession, but it is these thoughts that our acknowledgement of sin should reflect.

It is only little by little that any Christian can recognize the moral implications of his belief in the various mysteries of Christ. Being conformed to Christ in his death and resurrection requires a prolonged process of conversion. We need the sacrament of penance many, many times before any of us will come to the fulness of our baptism.

One often hears St Paul denounced as pessimistic because of his long lists of sins. What those lists really show is the spiritual realism of St Paul. It doesn't surprise him to find that some beginner in the Christian life is not completely "spiritual." He knows that various kinds of defective behaviour are inevitable without the healing presence of the Spirit; and Christians, even sincere Christians, come to possess that Spirit only gradually.

Recognizing and confessing our sins shows us where the path still lies ahead. It makes explicit our sense of baptism's grace still to be accomplished.

We need a satisfactory language in which to speak about sin. At present, only a rare few are able to convey where their "difficulties in leading the Christian life" are. Like an unlocated pain, such difficulties are hard to treat.

The greatest service any Christian writer could do for his fellow Christian at the present day would be to give us the words by which we could accurately locate the wounds of our sins.

4. The Burden of Sin

Choosing a penance for someone in confession might seem the easiest part of the sacrament. Mostly we are accustomed to being asked to say some prayer or other, and this at first sight seems least in need of change.

Probably it's true that immediate and dramatic change is not needed. For the time being, the priest's suggestion of an appropriate prayer is satisfactory enough.

But in the long run, the kind of penance given in confession may well prove the best indicator of how well we have understood the renewal taking place in this sacrament in the church today. It shows whether or not we understand how conversion takes place within the Christian life — "continuing one's conversion," as the new rite puts it, so as to become truly Catholic.

(One should, of course, turn upside-down the phrase so popular among Pentecostal groups some years ago — "I've been a Catholic since childhood, but I became a Christian last year." Rather, we've been Christians for years, and we are becoming Catholic.)

The basis for deciding on a penance is not that big sins deserve heavy penances. The penance needs to be taken seriously for every penitent. It needs to be "a real remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life" (Introduction, 6). So it must correspond to the spiritual maturity of the individual making his confession.

Doing penance is an important element in the virtue of penitence; therefore those who have grown in this virtue ought more readily to grasp what it demands in practice.

I doubt, however, that this part of the sacrament of Reconciliation will develop much until we have gained a lot more skill in the manner of making our confession. A true "antidote to weakness" (Introduction, 18) cannot be given until the real weakness has been diagnosed.

This supposes among priests that they "understand the disorders of souls and apply the appropriate remedy....Discernment of spirits is a deep knowledge of God's action in the hearts of men; it is a gift of the Spirit as well as the fruit of charity." (Introduction, 10)

While not authorising a confessor to presume to be each individual's "spiritual director," the new rite sees a close relationship between these two roles. Unhappily in the recent past, they had grown too far apart from each other.

A suitable penance given in confession may well be the most important kind of spiritual direction. It certainly avoids the danger of spiritual "talk-therapy," and it is akin to the great tradition of the Desert Fathers.

Sacramental penance means that some specific act aimed at overcoming weakness becomes in the strict sense a sacrament. Not only does it express some appropriate degree of personal penitence, but this act of penance assigned by the confessor has a sacramental power to express our contrition and to make us know the reality of Christ's victory over sin, like the blind man washing in the pool of Bethsaida.

The penance is itself part of the liturgy of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and so the same principle applies to it as to all other liturgy: "good liturgy builds up faith; bad liturgy weakens or even kills faith" (US Bishops' Conference). An appropriate penance is a part of the liturgy of confession that deserves great attention; the grace and effectiveness of the sacrament itself depend on it.

The penance in confession has probably been regarded in recent years as something of a pious option. A sentence in the Introduction gives us a clue to its real importance: "It is necessary that the act of penance really be a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life. Thus the penitent, 'forgetting the things which are behind him' (Philippians 3:13), again becomes part of the mystery of salvation and turns himself towards the future." (6)

Therefore even in celebrating Rite II of the sacrament of Reconcilia-

tion (where a group of people make a communal preparation, followed by individual confession and absolution),the directive says that each individual is given a separate penance after he has made his confession.

This communal celebration is different from the confession of a single person, even in the way it supposes the various members of the congregation make their confessions. Yet even though penitents may make a much less detailed confession when Rite II is used, the penance still needs to be as relevant to each individual as possible. A general penance given to everyone at the end misses out on a quite significant detail.

Of course, if from the start one thinks of penances as a form of punishment for sin, it becomes very hard to make religious sense of this part of the sacrament. Without giving a full explanation, let us simply note that the Introduction nowhere hints at any such equation between penance and punishment.

Penances, even when they take the form of self-denial or mortification, are an expression of the infused virtue of penitence; they are the remedy for sin, rather than punishment imposed by a court. They are of worth because they are expressions of repentant love.

The real burden of sin in this life is that it saps our taste for God; it robs us of what little energy we have for goodness.

I have always thought it notable that the prayer for the feast of St Dominic does not speak about him as a preacher, but asks that "we who are bowed down by the burden of our sins may be alleviated by St Dominic's fatherly care."

Clearly, what people remembered about St Dominic wasn't the eloquence he undoubtedly had, or his passion for truth, but the fact that he was the sort of man to whom it was easy to admit that you had made a mess of things. He understood, and had the power to lift people when the load of accumulated failure was getting them down.

Real holiness has that power to remove the oppressive burdensomeness of evil. At least while we are in their company, holy people seem to make us feel that it's natural and easy to reach out to God.

Sin's burden is the lack of taste for goodness, the weariness of going on, the uncertainty of where we ought to be going anyway. It's not much help trying to identify the experience exactly, but it corresponds

to our defectiveness in faith, hope and love — or in catechism terms — darkness of intellect, weakness of will, inclination to evil: the attractiveness of some more immediate goal which seems to be less demanding.

One cannot apply correctives to all three of these effects of sin at once. The penance assigned in confession is aimed at counteracting some part of this. Yet doing one's penance is not just an exercise in psychotherapy.

Too readily people think that what is mainly required in overcoming sin is more will-power. But sin in a Catholic is overcome by the vision which is faith, and by the openness of heart that allows God's love and God's Spirit to enter in. The penance given in confession must direct our attention to where the source of renewal comes from, as much as nudging us away from the source of contamination.

This raises one final point of confusion among Catholics today. Spiritual direction, as most of us receive it through Sunday Mass and a bit of advice here and there, seems haphazard. By contrast, some modern systems proposed by various renewal programmes have an appearance of thoroughness which makes them look more promising and effective. Certainly, many people who have experienced such programmes cannot imagine how they would have become committed Catholics without them. Yet the question remains: how deliberate and systematic do we need to be, in order to become fully one with the body of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? How do the stages of spiritual growth correspond to the structures and organization of these renewal programmes? How much disciplined effort is required to be a Christian?

Perhaps we can begin to resolve the dilemma by starting with the word "Christian." For most of us, it implicitly contains a programme of what we think is to be achieved, a certain package of characteristics and qualities; and most of us think we could proably reach this state, if we put our minds to it.

But the Catholic tradition of spiritual guidance, stretching back to early monasticism, has always seen the liturgy as the normal way in which all Christians are formed. Week by week, day by day, our perception of what it is to be Christian is being changed slightly; and if

we live by that insight, even for the day, we find that over a time our point of view moves considerably.

An understanding of Christ, and of what it means to be a Christian, can be arrived at over a period of many years, and generally we do not come to it through the steps outlined in systematic theology. Being too deeply wedded to systems can leave us unsympathetic to the unlikely nudging of God's Spirit.

The saints often have a way of seeing the Christian life that upsets all our presuppositions. Of course they have general Christian goals in common with the rest of us. But living spiritually from hand to mouth makes out of them different characters from what one would at first expect.

All this is quite relevant to our discussion of the penance assigned in confession. It may not seem as systematic and thorough as some other methods of spiritual formation, but it may well correspond more closely to the normal ways through which a Christian goes.

It is not absolutely necessary that there be continuity from one confession to the next, or that the penance follows systematically on from the one assigned last time (although it would surely be helpful to ask ourselves how the performing of that penance has influenced us since our last confession).

Perhaps if our manner of listing our sins could become less routine, our confession would convey some sense of where we stand in the Christian journey. Then the priest would be able to guide us to the next step, with a penance that is a "true antidote to our weakness" and a "help to renewal of life" — to continue on the Christian way.

5. The Loneliness of Sin

So much has been said about community in recent years that one could come to think that all solitariness was evil.

True indeed, all sin is a failure to love. But one should not conclude from this that all sin is selfishness. Lots of sins are an attempt to escape from human solitariness; many of our sins are a false craving for community. The sad irony of sin is that its concrete result is to make our loneliness in some degree more desolate.

That is what is implied when Catholic doctrine states that sin weakens or kills charity. It destroys our true community with one another as Christians, while at the same time trying to mimic it.

The practical implications of this traditional Catholic doctrine were given wide publicity in popular religious writing in the last decade. The presentation may have suffered from some over-emphasis, for it seemed to suggest not only that charity is the "form" of every virtue, but that all virtue is co-terminous with love.

This view left itself open to the charge that what was being implied was that it didn't matter what you did, so long as you meant well or you did it lovingly!

The Catholic doctrine that love is the life-giving principle in every virtue is a theological statement: in other words, you can't see the point of it except in the context of Christian revelation.

The idea derives from our union in the body of Christ, and it adds a new level to our understanding of virtue in moral theology. It is therefore not just an insight into human behaviour, drawn from psychology or experience. It derives from the revelation concerning our being the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The corresponding idea of sin, its counterpart, is equally a part of Christian revelation, inaccessible except within the context of faith.

The forgiving of sin has a community dimension, not just in the sense that most of our sins add to the burden of social injustice in the world, but more specifically because our sins, as Catholics, fray the network of fibres linking us into the body of Christ.

Sin is a reluctance to live out our baptism, to be part of the people who live by this Way. Confession is therefore, quite literally, about "returning to the church."

All Christian moral effort is part of our striving to perfect the grace of baptism; though we may not be very conscious of it, it is "the love of Christ driving us on" (2 Cor:5) that sparks our activity: it is his love, rather than some moral ideal as it might be abstractly sketched in natural-law theory or by a benign Stoic.

Debate on morality has so concentrated on defining the negative limits of how far we can go that we are in danger of losing our specifically Catholic tradition: as the body of Christ we live according to the Way; what makes us Catholics is some degree of consciousness that each of our brethren is also trying to live this Way.

They may not talk about it much, but we are aware that it is a genuine undercurrent in all their thoughts. We may not be enthusiastic followers, but indisputably it is as followers of Christ along the Way that we see ourselves.

The Introduction to the rite of Reconciliation is therefore making a very important point when it repeatedly uses two different sets of terms: it talks about "the social aspect of sin and forgiveness" and about "the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament."

The current emphasis on the social aspect of sin is perfectly correct. "In fact, men frequently join together in doing injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance." (Introduction, 5) The only defect in this may be that having talked about the social or community aspect of sin, we might imagine that we have also dealt with the ecclesial aspect.

Talk about love is easily dismissed as bland. When it is said therefore that "love is the life-principle of every virtue," it must immediately be

added that love in this case is *agape,* a specifically Christian kind of love, the first effect of which is to bind us into the body of Christ, his church. All virtue has an ecclesial aspect. Sin destroys our bond with Christ; Reconciliation restores it.*

The sacrament of Reconciliation symbolizes a crucial aspect of the way in which we become Christians, fully incorporated into the body of Christ; at the same time it indicates what is contained in the unexpected statement that all virtue in a Catholic is ecclesial.

On the one hand, like redemption itself, all goodness is a gift to us from the church; on the other, all virtue in us is an expression of the life that binds us into the church. As every evil act damages human community, so in a Catholic every sin weakens our ties with the church, our being-in-the-body-of-Christ.

Due to influences stretching back six centuries, we have in the recent past so stressed the need for individual effort and individual grace that we have lost somewhat our sense of the necessity of the church, if any of us is to be a Christian. The present recovery of the meaning of the church will have to be linked to a recovery of what the sacrament of reconciliation itself means.

The old presentation of sin exclusively in terms of an offence against God led almost inevitably to the conclusion that it needed only interior contrition, and a ray of God's grace, to forgive sin. But confession is about reconciliation, about being made at one again with God our Father, through being drawn more fully into Christ, whose body is the church.

No one could read the Introduction or the various prayers in the new rite of Reconciliation, without being struck by the frequency with which forgiveness is linked with each of the three Persons of the Trinity:

"The sinner who by the grace of a merciful God embraces the way of

* Because one cannot say everything in a single article, we shall have to leave aside the implications of these statements for members of other churches or for the question of church unity.

Penance comes back to the Father who 'first loved us' (1 John 4), to Christ who gave himself for us, and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us abundantly." (5)

"In the sacrament of penance, the Father receives the repentant son who comes back to him, Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings it back to the sheepfold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies this temple of God again and lives more fully within it." (6)

"The confessor fulfils a paternal function: he reveals the heart of the Father and shows the image of the Good Shepherd." (10)

"The form of absolution indicates that the reconciliation of the penitent comes from the mercy of the Father; it shows the connexion between the reconciliation of the sinner and the paschal mystery of Christ; it stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins; finally, it underlines the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament, because reconciliation with God is asked for, and given, through the ministry of the church." (19)

Moreover, during the formula of absolution, the priest stretches out his hands over the head of the penitent in the ancient gesture invoking the Holy Spirit, the *epiklesis*.

We can do little more than hint at the implications of all this in regard to moral theology, to Christian spirituality, and even to the practical details of celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. But it is this that gives point to two sentences in the new rite which might easily be slipped over as pious exhortations:

"Thus the faithful Christian, as he experiences and proclaims the mercy of God in his life, *celebrates with the priest the liturgy* by which the church continually renews itself." (11)

"The penitent continues his conversion and expresses it by a life renewed according to the gospel." (20)

In spite of the richness of doctrine in these various references to the Trinity, what is required of the penitent is basically very simple, even surprising. We are reconciled to God our Father by showing our willingness to join this company of sinners who are the Catholic Church.

We are a people who are sinners, and only those who are willing to recognize and admit this of themselves are capable of being part of the

church. Sinlessness is not the condition needed for being a Catholic. And freedom from sin cannot be achieved in some private arrangement between an individual and God.

It is important for any real spiritual growth that someone knows that the rest of us will not think the less of him because he has come to recognize and admit his sin and his need for restoration.

Perhaps we have laid such emphasis on the *priest's* obligation to observe "confessional secrecy" that we've never suggested there is a parallel duty on the whole church community. Being sinners is the common lot of all of us. The first courtesy the church extends to any of us is the assurance that admitting we are sinners will never be used as a stick to beat us.

It will take a long time for us to learn how to fulfil the instruction in the new rite: "The priest should welcome the penitent..." (16) How do we set about conveying to others that they are welcome as sinners, that here is a place where it is possible to repent?

Very few Catholics have as yet ever had a chance to experience this as it is ritually celebrated in the second form of the rite of Reconciliation. So far most people start with horror at what they imagine might be implied in the suggestion that "communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance." (22)

Together we have to come to an understanding of the divine equity which preserves one of us from some evil or sets another free from the same evil. Goodness in any of us is God's achievement. It is this that makes us stand in wonder at the mystery of the church, the mystery of which we ourselves are a part: evil overcome, sin turned into holiness, death changed into resurrection.

But as yet, for the most part men walk solitarily among the lonely sand-dunes of their sins.

Priests and laity alike have a great deal to learn about the meaning of conversion; and we have hardly begun to think how this mystery of our faith should be celebrated appropriately in the sacramental rite of Reconciliation.

"What makes the journey bearable is that one travels always in company." (James K. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook*)

6. The Second Rite of Reconciliation

At present the Church offers us two rites of reconciliation. In Rite I the sacrament is celebrated in the confessional-room by the priest and penitent alone. This Rite allows more time to be spent with the individual penitents.

Rite II is described as "the rite of reconciliation of several penitents, with individual confession and absolution."

The main characteristic of Rite II is that it is a communal expression of our awareness that we are indeed a Church of sinners, needing to be reconciled both to each other and to God. An individual is capable of acknowledging his own sinfulness only because the community has already done so; an individual 'joins the Church' by stating, in some way, that he, like them, is a sinner.

It would be easy to assume that Rite II consisted of a communal preparation for a group of people, with examination of conscience, after which each individual went to confession, in the old style; and, further, to assume that this last bit is really the Sacrament of Penance. It must, therefore, be stressed that the whole rite is the sacrament; the whole of this liturgy is a unit.

Being present at the Rite of Reconcilation is itself the first way that one 'confesses' that one is a sinner in need of repentance and reconciliation. Later on in the Rite the individual may make this statement more explicit by walking to where the priest sits and making a personal statement of his own sinfulness. The action of going forward, in front of the community, should be seen as a very important liturgical gesture, expressing both the faith and the sorrow of the individual. True, enough, when he comes to the priest the penitent quietly and briefly tells his sins, before being given a penance and receiving absolution.

Because of the corresponding importance of the priest's actions of recieving the penitent, by imposing his hands on the head of the penitent, this part of the rite needs to be done in view of the congregation. The Rite, including both the gesture of the penitent and that of the priest, is, therefore a statement of the faith of the individual and a statement of the faith of this whole community: we are a community of penitent sinners.

As a consequence, the effect of this 'confession' exends beyond the individual; it does not simply win forgiveness or reconcilation for this single individual Christian. "The worship of each brings salvation to all."

Reconciliation is a many-sided process. It implies some change, if only slight, in our relationship with every individual present. My confession, my action of stepping forward to ask for reconciliation, becomes for all the community, a source of the reconciling presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. By being joined to the community which possesses the Spirit, we are filled with the Spirit. It is the whole community present that celebrates the sacrament of reconciliation, and each one of the community benefits from being part of that celebration, even if, on a particular occasion he does not make an individual confession (as one benefits from being at Mass even when one does not receive Communion).

On coming forward to the priest the individual does not use the usual phrases: 'Bless me, father, etc." since all this has been included, along wth the 'Confiteor,' in the earlier parts of the rite. One could use some simple phrase like: "I am sorry for my sins, especially..."

Although one should mention any sins which are troubling one seriously in conscience, it is better not to enumerate all the usual 'list's' e.g. "distraction at prayer," "impatience," etc. It is preferable to concentrate on some particular application of the Gospel, where one realises that one is failing significantly especially where there is malice or wilfulness.

For those who go to confession frequently, it is a convenient practice to take the previous Sunday's Gospel, for example, and ask oneself how seriously one has attempted, during the last week, to respond to its particular message. This can help to protect one from routine lists of sins; and, over the three years' cycle of Sunday readings, it can alert a person to most areas of Christian practice and belief. Normally, in Rite

The characteristic of all temptation is that it is attractive, and not abhorrent. In the temptations of Jesus we see that what is presented to him is not blatantly evil; there would have been genuine basis for finding it desirable.

So even in regard to our regular sins, few of them are things about which we feel instinctively guilty; we are so accustomed to the reasonableness and desirability of what we do that there is no space in our thoughts to allow for another view of things. This is why we need the Church to reveal the sinfulness of our attitudes to us. And we need the infused spirit of penitence even to begin to feel sorry for our sin.

Alas, our first sin is to be reluctant to follow the Spirit who would drive us out into the desert, as Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert.

Readings for the second Sunday of Lent are on the Transfiguration, and on the temptation of Abraham. Abraham's trials point to the fact that it is God who tests us. This is how God extends us. Our instincts resist being thus drawn out by God. In face of the growing-pains of goodness we curl up in front of the T.V. or, perhaps, even refuse to get out of bed. Unwillingness to be extended is a recognisable layer of our being — and it is also part of our experience of sin. Falling asleep over one's prayers, like the apostles sleeping on Tabor, may not rank as grave evil, but it may be a symptom of spiritual deafness that refuses to let in God's voice. We would rather not be the people that God wants to make us.

The cleansing of the Temple is the gospel scene on the third Sunday of Lent. This brings to mind the words in the Rite of Reconciliation which say that in this sacrament the Holy Spirit again sanctifies his temple. One might ask, therefore, to what extent do we understand our own bodies as the temples of the Spirit, or, to what extent do we see Christian virtue as being the embodying of the Spirit? Materialism is a different kind of sin from hedonism — few of us have the energy to be hedonists, dedicated to pleasure. Rather, one can be so utilitarian in regard to life that nothing of the spark of the Spirit is experienced.

By and large Catholics look on failings in regard to sexuality as real sins; but few other things are recognised immediately as sin. In this third week of Lent the Gospel hints that our bodies must be seen not

just as the locus of sin, but as the temples of the Spirit: we must embody the Spirit. Our sense of touch, our sense of being lovingly present to others, healing and tending others, are all part of our bodiliness. If we fail to see that this body and these actions are connected to the Holy Spirit himself, then sin is part of our mentality.

The fourth week of Lent is summed up in Psalm 136: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept." Repentence easily can be misconstrued, as though it were a matter of reconstructing the past. We imagine that if we could get back to the innocence of childhood all would be perfect, back to the first strength of younger years. "Happy those early days when I shined in my Angel-infancy." (Andrew Marvel.) But repentance is not about languishing for the past and its supposed innocence. It is about allowing God to shape the future. Christian life is about going into the future wherever God takes us, rather than hankering for some momentary point in the past when, from our point of view, everything seemed nice.

Evil is indeed a reality but we should recognise that the pleasantly good prospect of recreating the past can be itself a most alluring form of sin. The future to which God draws us will bear the sign of the crucified Lord, and there we would rather not go.

On the fifth Sunday of Lent the Gospel is St John's image of the wheat: "Unless the wheat-grain dies it alone remains, but if it dies it produces a great harvest." I suggest that where Catholics are most likely to misinterpret this Gospel passage is that we think of dying in terms of destructiveness; and God thinks of dying in terms of being consumed with love. Fear of seeing the destruction of things which are good or even valuable make us unable to choose a less sure path. Like the servant in the parable who buried his talent we are unready for the risk in being Christian. Fortitude should be an ingredient of the Christian's daily life; it is not only a matter of stamina under persecution. Conservatism is a more likely source of sin than recklessness in a society where conservatism is established as the basic virtue. It makes us too lazy to work out the difference between what is good and what is not-good-enough.

There is a self-forgetfulness in love that makes one not notice that one's resource, and one's whole self, are being consumed in the enter-

prise on hand. A person who is for ever calculating so that he won't expend too much effort or time on his tasks may indeed conserve his energy, but he may never have known what it is to be alive. Perhaps it has been the image of the "Recording Angel" which has inspired the idea, but thrift and tidiness and getting the answer right have figured in our portrait of the Christian in a way that the Gospel hardly warrants. Staying alive is not our ultimate objective. Being alive is not the same as not wanting to die. If we are ever to live we need to be rescued from our fear of dying; and more immediately we need to be rescued from the endless precautions we take against death. We will hoard anything which might keep death away, we will willingly see others endangered or deprived to assure our own safety. Love is an attentiveness to God and to His creatures that no longer notices that one is being consumed.

8. Hiding from God

(A homily at Rite II celebrated with a group of priests)

That very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem...Now as they talked Jesus himself came up and walked by their side.
Lk 24:13-35

St Luke's great narrative of the journey to Jerusalem occupies a major part of his gospel. I think that in this story of Emmaus he means us to feel bewildered that disciples who had toiled so hard to get to Jerusalem could simply slip away into the night as though the journey and its destination had never been.

True enough, they didn't go far, Emmaus was only seven miles away, but we recognise their way of thinking, being content to get lost, to hide in a suburb of the city of God, when one is afraid of what lies at the heart of it.

Wandering away from God takes many forms, and may be motivated by many a fear or a spasm of rashness. Wandering from the way is Luke's prototype of all that sin is, just as, for the psalmist, being in exile, far from Jerusalem, is the essence of evil.

"Alas that I abide a stranger in Meshech
dwell among the tents of Kedar." Ps 119

"My soul is longing and yearning
is yearning for the courts of the Lord." Ps 83

Through his gospel Luke hints repeatedly that there are two different kinds of exile, two different kinds of estrangement: there is the prodigal son who wanders abroad, but there is the elder son whose heart has become its own wilderness. There is even Martha scolding

Mary. There are the shepherds on the hills, and the inattentive crowds within the temple itself.

So, likewise, Luke shows us two images of Jesus: in Chapter 15 he is the shepherd searching the desert for the lost sheep; and today in the Emmaus story the Lord searches the streets and alleys of the city, like the Bride in the Song of Songs; the Lord searching for the stray disciples who use even the holy city as a place to hide from God. Was it really for fear of the Jews that the disciples had gathered in the upper room with the door locked, hiding?

Hiding from God may indeed be a more accurate word than wandering to express our own particular degree of unfaithfulness. We, who are priests, have all indeed travelled a long way on the journey; we may not feel very proud of ourselves, but it is true that we have forgone many choices in order to come to where we are today. However, spiritually, we are like a waif in an alleyway still — afraid of the last bit of the journey, which would take us to its end-point.

Yet like Cleopas and his companion we've actually had a look at the end-point, and like them, we've decided that there isn't much there — a cross, an empty tomb, some woman's talk startling us by saying he was risen. Cleopas and his companion had left the disciples. They do not disbelieve in God, nor even in God's plan — "it had been our hope that Jesus would have been the one to set Israel free."

Not disbelief but what I would call incredulousness is what betrays them, as it does us, as we refuse to allow our hearts to be touched by the faith and the insight of our fellow disciples.

Our wandering from God is not a matter of spectacular wickedness. As priests, especially as priests here on the road to Emmaus together, our distance from God is more often due to an air of distrust of one another's witness; the incredulousness which causes us to write off what we hear one another say about Christ, the cross, the empty tomb and the women who have seen it.

The Lord Jesus, the stranger on the road, had to teach them again what they had refused already to hear from the mouth of their fellow disciples.

Distrust of one's fellow believers is surely the commonest way of hiding from the God in whom we say we believe.

Laugh at one another's foibles; but beware ever laughing at his faith.

But do not imagine that such a new trust in the faith and insight of one another will lead to clear vision. After Christ has found the two disciples on the road, they have to set out at once to go back to Peter and the others, but by now it is night.

"In the moment of recognising him the Lord vanished from their sight." He remains a hidden God, in whose presence we walk.

That presence of the Emmaus Lord is with us in this sacrament. Let us each recognise in our own hearts that we have wandered from him, that we have hidden from him to escape the consequences of Christ's cross, that we have turned away from those who have attempted to give us the knowledge of his resurrection.

In chapter 5 of Luke's gospel Peter said: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Rather it is that: "I, the sinner, have departed from you, and you have left the ninety-nine to search for me; bind me again to yourself, so that I may not hide from you, but in you the hidden one find again the one in whom I live."

9. Pride

(Homily III Week Easter)

Jesus himself stood among them and said 'Peace be with you.' In a state of alarm and fright they thought they were seeing a ghost. Lk 24:35-48

Temptation is often presented as being co-terminous with over-indulgence in material things. It's easy to interpret the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in such a way, as temptations to self-indulgence.

However, last Sunday's gospel points out that one of the real temptations of the apostles after Easter was to deny the material — to settle for a spiritual religion, high-minded and sincere. But this is only another form of the return to paganism, a kind of religion which assumed an unbridgeable gap between God and the material world. It is possible to believe in God, and in life after death, and in divine retribution, and still not be Christian.

The difficulty about believing in the reality of the Resurrection is basically the same as believing that God could become man, that the Word became flesh. It is repugnant to us to think that material things could be the vehicle for the Spirit. In particular, that a particular man, with flesh and bones that could be seen and touched, could be God.

Now I think that normally this problem troubles us not in discussion about the nature of the Trinity, but in regard to ourselves. In fact, our ability to accept the reality of the Incarnation grows parallel to our perception that even in ourselves the body is the place where God's Spirit and his grace find embodiment.

High-mindedness is one of the most constant temptations we fall for; its evil is not immediately obvious. It makes us long for a different

kind of goodness than that which our God offers us — and in the end it is a self-limiting and crippling mentality which is anti-human.

The biblical word for it is "hubris," pride. One interesting aspects of the idea, both in scripture and in ancient writings, is that "hubris" has a deep link with cruelty. Underneath hubris, pride, is a hatred of the material world, and of our fellowmen, even a resentment that one is oneself material and bodily. With such a mentality one could never truly accept Easter.

Do we really accept then that it is within the functioning of this stupidly ineffective carcass of mine that God's Spirit is possessed, or, rather, that God can possess us. Our very busyness with things of the mind, whether education, or legal rights and justice, can make us sour that often people can be happy without our high-minded endeavours for them, or that God can be present in ways we fail to analyse intellectually.

But the temptation applies most of all within ourselves, where, by a rule which we never make explicit, we define that God can be present in only certain superior activity. Eating bread and honey, or cold fish, as Jesus did, would not be numbered among our samples of divine activity.

The frail and transitory human delights are as much the point at which God reveals himself, as are the states of weakness and even suffering and death.

Holy Week shows us the paradox of God's power finding its perfect expression in the Crucifix. Easter reaffirms the mystery of God's Spirit embodied in matter. And one mystery is as hard to accept as the other.

But being Eastertime perhaps we should stay with the mystery of good. Perhaps the symptom of our sin which we might note is just the sense of sourness that the good things aren't good enough, or that the whole thing seems too trifling to be taken with the divine seriousness we expect of God.

10. Knowing how to choose the good

(A homily for Week 26, Year B)

John said to Jesus, 'Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' Mk 9:38-48

There seems a very big leap from the first to the second half of today's gospel. First we are told "what is not against you is for you," and then we are told "if your hand or eye scandalises you pluck it out."

The first bit of advice seems to counsel moderation: we must recognise the good in things which seem to be only 'not-bad'; but the second warning seems a quite immoderate command to amputate crucial segments of human life if they prove just unhelpful. In between these two incidents there is the phrase about being rewarded merely for a cup of water if done in Christ's name — which seems to imply that things which are not of much importance become good just because of a change in motivation.

This leaves us with three possible interpretations of what might be meant by "a purpose of amendment": it could mean just looking onthe bright side of things, or perhaps improving one's good intention, or it could demand a radicalism with oneself which hacks into the roots of our sin with the reckless exuberance of a wrecker knocking down an old building before the Historic Places Trust can have a preservation order placed on it.

One thing is certain, that radicalism can happen only once or twice in a lifetime. Tearing out eyes or cutting off hands cannot be the response to everyday situations. Time comes in the life of everyone of us when something vast and even painful is the only option left us if

we are to remain loyal to God. But on the day-to-day basis the other recommendations of today's reading are the most relevant; and if we don't familiarise ourselves with the ways of implementing these two other strategies, we'll likely be unprepared for the kind of test that needs to be faced with vigour.

Most likely, the fault among us who regularly celebrate the sacraments, go to Mass or attend the Reconciliation Rite, is that our image of sin is so black that sin seems improbable and horrendous. Therefore we plead: Not guilty! The gentle advice in today's gospel might be taken to mean that for the moment we should forget our former definitions of sin and ask merely what things are against us, and what things are not against us. Sin or evil means the things that are, in this Christian meaning, against us. John the apostle made the mistake of labelling too many things as evil; and he wasn't left with enough allies to be able to carry on.

It may seem strange advice to be given here as we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconcilialtion, but it's certain that Jesus first warns us not to be quite so ready to call things sins.

Only as our instinct becomes tuned to recognising good can we discern also that other things stink. But our deepest weakness is our lack of sureness in recognising good.

In fact, if I was to pick out one real sin which is being revealed to us in today's gospel it would be the moral laziness which makes us fail to recognise the good in our own lives, or in others. Only when you have accurately discerned the shape of the tree can you begin to prune it.

We are rather like the general at the siege of Carcasson, the heretic stronghold, during the Albigensian Crusade. He gave orders to kill all the heretics in the town, and when asked how they would distinguish the heretics he said: "Kill the lot, God will know His own."

Forming a Christian conscience is about sensitizing us to the good. Spiritual crudity, an impatience to discriminate between the bad and the merely unhelpful, or merely undeveloped, or merely neutral, is the way we most readily capitulate to evil.

11. The Dried-up Heart

(Homily for a group of religious)

It was because you were so unteachable that Moses wrote this command for you, allowing a man to divorce his wife.
Mk 10:2-16

It may seem odd that the Lectionary has thrown up this unlikely text on marriage for our own reflection this evening as we, celibates, celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation. As I have suggested before, it seems appropriate to me that normally we should use the previous Sunday's Gospel as the basis for our examination of conscience in celebrating Rite II regularly, for we must allow explicitly the word of God to search our hearts and reveal our sin to us. Therefore, let us return to yesterday's Gospel, Mark 10.

Our first instinct is to assume that this Gospel text on divorce is non-relevant to celibates, though not denying that sometimes celibates may fail seriously in this regard. In listening to any Gospel reading we need to be alert especially to any word which could reveal to us, individually, the real core of our own personal hard-heartedness (our unteachableness).

By parallel, in our own regard, too, God's first intention for us often has had to be modified. Many a duty has had to be taken from us because, seeing our reluctance to carry the burden, it was useless for God any longer to entrust some task to us. That, of course, is not only the personal story of us individually; it is the story of Man and our Fall. And at the core of it is our hard-heartedness.

The word translated as "unteachable" is "sklerokardia," sclerosis of the heart (cardiac sclerosis). This is the quality that Jesus says leads to the breakdown in family loyalty: "Moses allowed divorce because of your hard-heartedness."

Celibacy and marriage are protected by the same virtue, chastity. Its opposite is hardness of heart. Failure in celibacy or marriage might easily be blamed on hedonism, or mere lack of willpower, or simply on uncontrolled instinct. The Gospel hints that the fault is not merely an

unreadiness to accept unpalatable instructions; rather one is unable to follow the instructions, for one's heart is out of tune with them — in some way the heart has gone dead.

The dried-up heart (sklerokardia) shows itself again in the second part of the Gospel, in the bureaucratic fussiness of the apostles, as they try to get rid of the women who brought their children to Jesus. The demandingness of that scene might escape us if we see Jesus' action as a sample of benign paternalism. Indeed, paternalism is a lighter option; much easier to pat a child on the head than to put up with a mother who is demanding that you pay special attention to her particular child. I suspect dryness of heart finds its earliest expression in our instinct to bureaucratise the calls of those in need, or even to give a mere bureaucratic answer to the calls of our own hearts. Dealing harshly with one's own needs may well be a sign of hardness of heart, the withered heart which no longer can hear God's voice calling.

St Thomas Aquina has a startling remark to make about all this: "No man can live without delight, and that is why if one is deprived of spiritual delight one turns to carnal pleasure." (It is well to remember that the word "spiritual" is not equivalent to "religious"; for Aquinas the word includes especially the joy of friendship, of knowledge, of the arts, and also sheer fun.) He goes on to say that it is more often through lack of delight than through the presence of what is painful that the body is apt to weigh on the soul and impede study or thought. The hardness of heart of which the Gospel speaks is an early effect of our refusal to be delighted by the gifts with which God surrounds us; for God has first loved us.

Acidia, the vice which in English came to be called sloth, results from our not taking the care that God extends to us.

The "hardness of heart" spoken of in today's Gospel can reflect a wide spectrum of faults in us; each of us alone knows its secret contents. Perhaps the change of insight on the nature of our sin which this Gospel affords us is to let us see that the cause (source) of sin is an unwillingness to be delighted by God's gifts which surround us, and instead to feel resentment because of what we have not received.

Hardness of heart encompasses all our sins. In some sense the only humiliation required for our repentance is that we accept this description of ourselves — we are hard-hearted. Let us ask the dew of God again to soften this barren soil.

12. The Pre-occupation with sin

(Homily Week 22 B)

In this way you make God's word null and void for the sake of your traditions which you have handed down. "Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean."

Mk 7:13-15

Preoccupation with one's state of sinfulness can itself be the most harmful sin — i.e. the thing keeping us decisively at arm's length from God.

The counterpart of this is the supposition that one should be individually resourceful enough to cope with evil — one should have sets of rules and rituals to ensure that one is correct. One thus becomes an expert in the use of the measuring system — and God is blotted out of one's consciousness, or, as Mark says, "out of one's heart."

Our own generation, with its troubles about guilt, is no worse than other ages. The pharisees were good people, too, paralysed by their intenseness; unfree for God. Redeemed pharisees, like St Paul, have been the glory of Christ's work — set free for God.

Like Paul we have to be not self-torturing. Even in making our confession there is no great necessity for lists of numbers of sins and kinds of sins.

Perhaps in the light of today's gospel our confession might best express itself in some words such as: "That I have been too worried about getting things right to think of God; let alone to be comfortable in his presence." God knows our worry, and He also knows what mistakes it leads us to.

13. The Mind of Christ

"The greatest commandment is to love God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind, and with all your strength."

This reading and its command to love God is so familiar to us that we don't notice how we change its meaning into a command to be dutiful towards God; thoroughly dutiful, true enough. It is just not thinkable that we should be expected to love so distant a being.

Loving God is quite a different activity from "being religious." It is not a bad thing to be religious, but it may not get much beyond ensuring that God's rights are not infringed, as one might keep a weather-eye open to make sure one didn't infringe the rights of some other minority which could prove troublesome.

Yet it is possible for us to love God only in so far as we permit God's lovableness to manifest itself.

Loving God with your whole heart and soul and mind means that first we must allow God's lovableness to show itself to us through all these aspects of our human life. This is where that love finds a place to reveal itself — in our bodies, and souls and minds.

To think of our Christian response merely in terms of religious duties to be fulfilled may well be at the heart of what sin is in us. Nearness to God is a matter of love and desire. A sense of duty may dampen it.

What is asked of us, therefore, is a radical change of mind — conversion. What we do may be externally in fact almost the same as we did before, but now done with a new heart.

Nowhere more than in the single command in today's Gospel do we realise that conversion is possible for us only when God changes our minds, when the Spirit forms the mind of Christ in us.

14. First Confession

An obvious conclusion to all that is being said here is that it would seem that First Confession for children normally should take place as part of an adult community celebrating Rite II. As I have suggested earlier, most adults are, at present, unable to use Rite I effectively and they need to allow themselves to be formed again by taking part in the celebration of Rite II week by week over a considerable time. Only thus can they acquire a language that can give expression to the way in which we perceive sin in ourselves; then, too, we will come to know how Christ's power overcomes evil.

This catechesis is needed by adults; children, for their part, can best come to understand the sacrament by watching adults at it, by seeing it happening in an adult community. By degrees, then, children can be brought to participate fully in rite II. An over-emphasis on "childrens confessions" distorts the sacrament in the same way that the Mass becomes distorted if it is geared exclusively to children.

In their own time young people will come to the point where they can usefully celebrate reconciliation also in Rite I. At that stage they will be able to deal with a larger span of their lives, with greater perception of how God calls us and forms us, even though we, on our part, hold back.

Children, and adults too, need to be taught how in this sacrament God "perfects the grace of baptism." The Sacrament of Penance is not to be reduced to a duty done once a year; it is something required as a normal on-going ingredient in the Christian life. It is not an onerous ingredient. Rather, it is one of the ways in which God lifts the onus, lifts the burden, making it possible and good to go on.

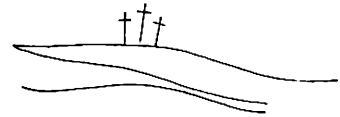
DISCUSSION I

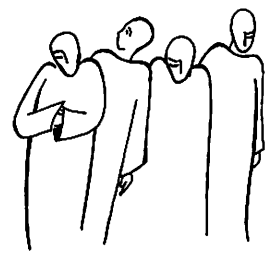
The Mystery of Sin

It used to be called Confession. Now it's known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but many are not sure why he name has changed. A better understanding of this sacrament is a key to the renewal of Catholic life.

"Because of human weakness, Christians turn aside from their early love and even break off their friendship with God by sinning."
"Conversion is not primarily an 'ethical' problem ... it is rather an essentially 'religious' problem which involves faith, that conscious and free response to the appeal of grace which God makes to man the sinner, in order that he would return his very existence to the living and true God, renouncing vain and empty idols."
"Sin consists in the non-recognition of God as God...."

Lineamenta p38-39





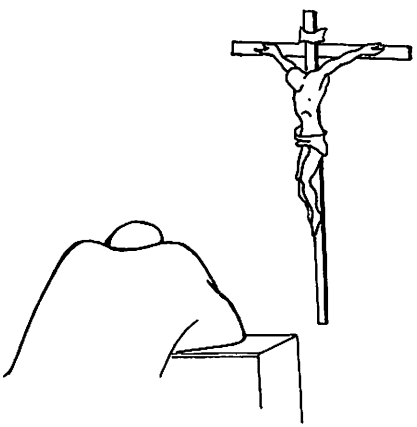
"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mt.4:1

1. **How is the reading from scripture likely to help us recognise our own sin?**
2. **"The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an experience of the Church proclaiming the forgiving word of God." In what ways do you find that this is so?**
3. **What changes will I/we have to make in our present practice and thinking if we are truly to be part of the full experience of Reconciliation?**

DISCUSSION II

The Grief of Sin

Part of the Christian experience is coping with the fact that sin and grace co-exist in the lives of all of us. As we need the virtue of patience to cope with our physical disabilities, so we need the virtue of penitence to deal with our sinfulness and failures.



1 **How does the story of the cockle and the wheat (Mt.13:24-30) help the Christian to understand sin and grace in his/her life? Is it normal then for a Christian to be a sinner?**

2. **"Penitence is a central virtue for the Christian." How then does penitence differ from "feeling guilty"? Should one feel sorry?**

3. **Read the ten examples of "prayers of the penitent" and compare them with the traditional "act of contrition" (see p.52).**

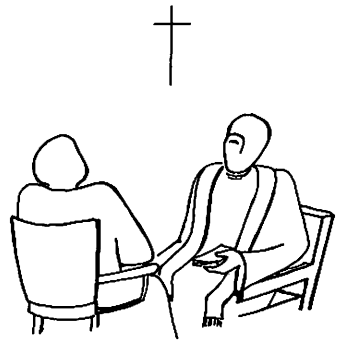
4. **What seems to be the role assigned to the Holy Spirit in Christian penitence? What does this mean for us?**

DISCUSSION III

The Tale of Sin

How do we tell our sins? We need words that better locate the wounds our sins cause. And that means a new language — as big a shift in Catholic practice as the change from Latin to English.

"The role of the priest is to help the penitent come to a true knowledge of himself or herself before God."

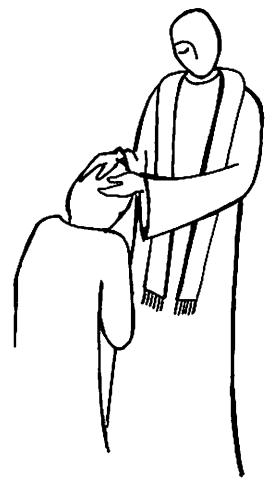


1. **Confession means finding some way of expressing, as adequately as one can, one's sense of having turned from God. Discuss this.**
2. **Sin is described as "a turning away from God," and grave sin as "Breaking the communion of love." What does this imply for you?**
3. **Does the traditional list of the seven deadly sins help you to come to a "true knowledge of yourself before God."?**
4. **How does the new emphasis of reflecting on Gospel values, and contrasting them with our own, help us to identify our real sins?**

DISCUSSION IV

The Burden of Sin

An integral part of confession is the penance which the priest gives to the penitent. Many Catholics still think of this as a punishment or a sentence handed down by a judge. The penance is, rather, a remedy for sin, part of the cure which this sacrament of Reconciliation celebrates, as we are set free from the burden of sin.



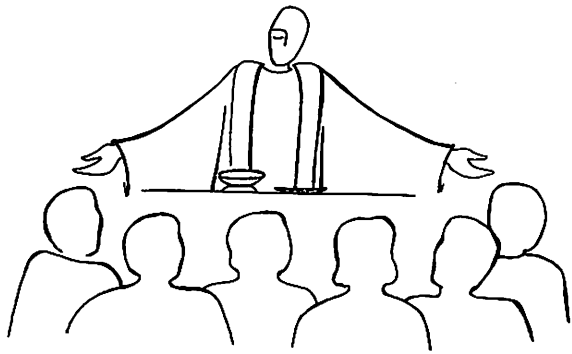
"The penitent continues his conversion and espresses it in a life renewed according to the gospel." (Introd. p20).

1. **What is your experience of penances given to you in past confessions?**
2. **If the penance is to be "a true antidote to our weakness" what are the most helpful penances that could be given?**
3. **The old penitential exercises of the Church (e.g. fasting) were used to help people overcome sin in their lives. Do you think that a present-day penitent should undertake any such exercises of self denial?**

DISCUSSION V

The Loneliness of Sin

Freedom from sin can't be achieved in some private arrangement between an individual and God. Just as every sin weakens our ties with the Church, so every grace and goodness comes to us through the Church and binds us more closely to the Body of Christ. We are reconciled to the Father by our willingness to join the company of sinners who are the Catholic Church.



1. **The Church is a community of repentant sinners. What qualities are needed then to bind such a community together?**
2. **How are we to make other sinners welcome among us? Remembering the past sins of others destroys the Body of Christ. What is your experience of this kind of lack of forgiveness in the Church?**
3. **What kind of liturgical rituals are needed to express this aspect of our reconciliation?**
4. **As happened with St Paul and Barnabas, at the human level, reconciliation is not always possible; Paul and Barnabas had to put oceans between them. Are there some broken relationships which can never be fully restored?**
5. **Where is the best place for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, both according to Rite I and according to Rite II?**
6. **Are there advantages in celebrating this sacrament frequently?**

Prayers of the Penitent

1. My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong
and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Saviour Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

2. Remember, Lord, your compassion and mercy *(85)*
which you showed long ago.
Do not recall the sins and failings of my youth.
In your mercy remember me, Lord, because of your goodness.
Psalm 24:6-7

3. Wash me from my guilt *(86)*
and cleanse me of my sin.
I acknowledge my offence;
my sin is before me always. Psalm 50:4-5

4. Father, I have sinned against you *(87)*
and am not worthy to be called your son.
Be merciful to me, a sinner. (Luke 15:18; 18:13)

5. Father of mercy, *(88)*
like the prodigal son
I return to you and say:
"I have sinned against you
and am no longer worthy to be called your son."
Christ Jesus, Saviour of the world,
I pray with the repentant thief
to whom you promised Paradise:
"Lord, remember me in your kingdom."
Holy Spirit, fountain of love,
I call on you with trust:
"Purify my heart,

and help me to walk as a child of light."

6. Lord Jesus, *(89)*
you opened the eyes of the blind,
healed the sick,
forgave the sinful woman,
and after Peter's denial confirmed him in your love.
Listen to my prayer:
forgive all my sins,
renew your love in my heart,
help me to live in perfect unity with my fellow Christians
that I may proclaim your saving power to all the world.

7. Lord Jesus, *(90)*
you chose to be called the friend of sinners.
By your saving death and resurrection
free me from my sins.
May your peace take root in my heart
and bring forth a harvest
of love, holiness, and truth.

8. Lord Jesus Christ, *(91)*
you are the Lamb of God;
you take away the sins of the world.
Through the grace of the Holy Spirit
restore me to friendship with your Father,
cleanse me from every stain of sin
in the blood you shed for me,
and raise me to new life
for the glory of your name.

9. Lord God, *(92)*
in your goodness have mercy on me:
do not look on my sins,
but take away all my guilt.
Create in me a clean heart
and renew within me an upright spirit.

10. Lord Jesus, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.

APPENDICES

English translation of the Introduction to the Rite of Penance ©1974 ICEL Inc.

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

Decree

Reconciliation between God and men was brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of his death and resurrection (see Romans 5:10). The Lord entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church in the person of the apostles (see 2 Corinthians 5:18ff). The Church carries this ministry out by bringing the good news of salvation to men and by baptising them in water and the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19).

Because of human weakness, Christians "turn aside from (their) early love" (see Revelation 2:4) and even break off their friendship with God by sinning. The Lord, therefore, instituted a special sacrament of penance for the pardon of sins committed after baptism (see John 20:21-23), and the Church has faithfully celebrated the sacrament throughout the centuries – in varying ways, but retaining its essential elements.

The Second Vatican Council decreed that "the rite and formulas of penance are to be revised in such a way that they may more clearly express the nature and effects of this sacrament."[1] In view of this the Congregation for Divine Worship has carefully prepared the new *Rite of Penance* so that the celebration of the sacrament may be more fully understood by the faithful.

In this new rite, besides the *Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents*, a *Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents* has been drawn up to emphasise the relation of the sacrament to the community. This rite places individual confession and absolution in the context of a celebration of the word of God. Furthermore, for special occasions a *Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution* has been composed in accordance with the Pastoral Norms

on General Sacramental Absolution, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on June 16, 1972.[2]

The Church is solicitous in calling the faithful to continual conversion and renewal. It desires that the baptised who have sinned should acknowledge their sins against God and their neighbour and have heartfelt repentance for them, and it tries to prepare them to celebrate the sacrament of penance. For this reason the Church urges the faithful to attend penitential celebrations from time to time. This Congregation has therefore made regulations for such celebrations and has proposed examples or specimens which episcopal conferences may adapt to the needs of their own regions.

Accordingly Pope Paul VI has by his authority approved the *Rite of Penance* prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship and ordered it to be published. It is to replace the pertinent sections of the *Roman Ritual* now in use. The Rite in its Latin original is to come into force as soon as it is published, but vernacular versions will be effective from the day determined by the episcopal conferences, after they have approved the translation and received confirmation from the Apostolic See.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the office of the Congregation for Divine Worship, December 2, 1973, the First Sunday of Advent.

By special mandate of the Pope

Jean Cardinal Villot
Secretary of State

† Annibale Bugnini
Titular Archbishop of Diocletiana
Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship

Notes

1. Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 72: *AAS* 56 (1964) 118.
2. See *AAS* 64 (1964) 510-514.

RITE OF PENANCE

INTRODUCTION

I

THE MYSTERY OF RECONCILIATION IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

1. The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross.[1] The Son of God made man lived among men in order to free them from the slavery of sin[2] and to call them out of darkness into his wonderful light.[3] He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: "Turn away from sin and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

This invitation to repentance, which had often been sounded by the prophets, prepared the hearts of men for the coming of the Kingdom of God through the voice of John the Baptist who came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

Jesus, however, not only exhorted men to repentance so that they should abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord,[4] but he also welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father.[5] Moreover, by healing the sick he signified his power to forgive sin.[6] Finally, he himself died for our sins and rose again for our justification.[7] Therefore, on the night he was betrayed and began his saving passion,[8] he instituted the sacrifice of the new covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins.[9] After his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, empowering them to forgive or retain sins[10] and sending them forth to all peoples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name.[11]

The Lord said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the forgiveness of sins by baptism: "Repent and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).[12] Since then the Church has never failed to call men from sin to conversion and by the celebration of penance to show the victory of Christ over sin.

2. This victory is first brought to light in baptism where our fallen nature is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin may be destroyed and we may no longer be slaves to sin, but rise with Christ and live for

God.[13] For this reason the Church proclaims its faith in "the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."

In the sacrifice of the Mass the passion of Christ is made present; his body given for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins are offered to God again by the Church for the salvation of the world. In the eucharist Christ is present and is offered as "the sacrifice which has made our peace"[14] with God and in order that "we may be brought together in unity"[15] by his Holy Spirit.

Furthermore our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he gave to his apostles and their successors power to forgive sins, instituted in his Church the sacrament of penance. Thus the faithful who fall into sin after baptism may be reconciled with God and renewed in grace.[16] The Church "possesses both water and tears: the water of baptism, the tears of penance."[17]

II

THE RECONCILIATION OF PENITENTS IN THE CHURCH'S LIFE

The Church is Holy but Always in Need of Purification

3. Christ "loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Ephesians 5:25-26), and he united the Church to himself as his bride.[18] He filled her with his divine gifts,[19] because she is his body and fullness, and through her he spreads truth and grace to all.

The members of the Church, however, are exposed to temptation and unfortunately often fall into sin. As a result, "while Christ, 'holy, innocent, and unstained' (Hebrews 7:26), did not know sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) but came only to atone for the sins of the people (see Hebrews 2:17), the Church, which includes within itself sinners and is at the same time holy and always in need of purification, constantly pursues repentance and renewal."[20]

Penance in the Church's Life and Liturgy

4. The people of God accomplishes and perfects this continual repentance in many different ways. It shares in the sufferings of Christ[21] by enduring its own difficulties, carries out works of mercy and charity,[22] and adopts ever more fully the outlook of the Gospel message. Thus the people of God becomes in the world a sign of conversion to God. All this the Church expresses in its life and celebrates in the liturgy when the faithful confess that they are sinners and ask pardon of God and of their brothers and sisters. This happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, and in the penitential aspects of the eucharistic celebration.[23]

In the sacrament of penance the faithful "obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins against him; at the same time they are reconciled with the Church which they wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example, and prayer."[24]

Reconciliation with God and with the Church

5. Since every sin is an offence against God which disrupts our friendship with him, "the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him."[25] Therefore, the sinner who by the grace of a merciful God embraces the way of penance comes back to the Father who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19), to Christ who gave himself up for us,[26] and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us abundantly.[27]

"By the hidden and loving mystery of God's design men are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others."[28] Penance always entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins.

In fact, men frequently join together to commit injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ they may work with all men of good will for justice and peace in the world.

The Sacrament of Penance and Its Parts

6. The follower of Christ who has sinned but who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the sacrament of penance should above all be converted to God with his whole heart. This inner conversion of heart embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life. It is expressed through confession made to the Church, due satisfaction, and amendment of life. God grants pardon for sin through the Church, which works by the ministry of priests.[29]

a) Contrition

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is "heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more."[30] "We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia.* This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance" (see Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:19 and *passim*).[31] The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it

may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ.

b) Confession

The sacrament of penance includes the confession of sins, which comes from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins. However, this inner examination of heart and the exterior accusation should be made in the light of God's mercy. Confession requires in the penitent the will to open his heart to the minister of God, and in the minister a spiritual judgment by which, acting in the person of Christ, he pronounces his decision of forgiveness or retention of sins in accord with the power of the keys.[32]

c) Act of Penance (Satisfaction)

True conversion is completed by acts of penance or satisfaction for the sins committed, by amendment of conduct, and also by the reparation of injury.[33] The kind and extent of the satisfaction should be suited to the personal condition of each penitent so that each one may restore the order which he disturbed and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which he suffered. Therefore, it is necessary that the act of penance really be a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life. Thus the penitent, "forgetting the things which are behind him" (Philippians 3:13), again becomes part of the mystery of salvation and turns himself toward the future.

d) Absolution

Through the sign of absolution God grants pardon to the sinner who in sacramental confession manifests his change of heart to the Church's minister, and thus the sacrament of penance is completed. In God's design the humanity and loving kindness of our Saviour have visibly appeared to us,[34] and God uses visible signs to give salvation and to renew the broken covenant.

In the sacrament of penance the Father receives the repentant son who comes back to him, Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings it back to the sheepfold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies this temple of God again or lives more fully within it. This is finally expressed in a renewed and more fervent sharing of the Lord's table, and there is great joy at the banquet of God's Church over the son who has returned from afar.[35]

The Necessity and Benefit of the Sacrament

7. Just as the wound of sin is varied and multiple in the life of individuals and of the community, so too the healing which penance

provides is varied. Those who by grave sin have withdrawn from the communion of love with God are called back in the sacrament of penance to the life they have lost. And those who through daily weakness fall into venial sins draw strength from a repeated celebration of penance to gain the full freedom of the children of God.

a) To obtain the saving remedy of the sacrament of penance, according to the plan of our merciful God, the faithful must confess to a priest each and every grave sin which they remember upon examination of their conscience.[36]

b) Moreover, frequent and careful celebration of this sacrament is also very useful as a remedy for venial sins. This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us ever more clearly.[37] In confession of this kind, penitents who accuse themselves of venial faults should try to conform more closely to Christ and to follow the voice of the Spirit more attentively.

In order that this sacrament of healing may truly achieve its purpose among Christ's faithful, it must take root in their whole lives and move them to more fervent service of God and neighbour.

The celebration of this sacrament is thus always an act in which the Church proclaims its faith, gives thanks to God for the freedom with which Christ has made us free,[38] and offers its life as a spiritual sacrifice in praise of God's glory, as it hastens to meet the Lord Jesus.

III

OFFICES AND MINISTRIES IN THE RECONCILIATION OF PENITENTS

The Community in the Celebration of Penance

8. The whole Church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord. Not only does the Church call sinners to repentance by preaching the word of God, but it also intercedes for them and helps penitents with maternal care and solicitude to acknowledge and admit their sins and so obtain the mercy of God who alone can forgive sins. Furthermore, the Church becomes the instrument of the conversion and absolution of the penitent through the ministry entrusted by Christ to the apostles and their successors.[39]

9 **The Minister of the Sacrament of Penance**

a) The Church exercises the ministry of the sacrament of penance through bishops and presbyters. By preaching God's word they call the faithful to conversion; in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit they declare and grant the forgiveness of sins.

In the exercise of this ministry presbyters act in communion with the bishop and share in his power and office of regulating the penitential discipline.[40]

b) The competent minister of the sacrament of penance is a priest who has the faculty to absolve in accordance with canon law. All priests, however, even though not approved to hear confessions, absolve validly and licitly all penitents who are in danger of death.

10 **The Pastoral Exercise of This Ministry**

a) In order to fulfill his ministry properly and faithfully the confessor should understand the disorders of souls and apply the appropriate remedies to them. He should fulfill his office of judge wisely and should acquire the knowledge and prudence necessary for this task by serious study, guided by the teaching authority of the Church and especially by fervent prayer to God. Discernment of spirits is a deep knowledge of God's action in the hearts of men; it is a gift of the Spirit as well as the fruit of charity.[41]

b) The confessor should always be ready and willing to hear the confessions of the faithful when they make a reasonable request of him.[42]

c) By receiving the repentant sinner and leading him to the light of the truth the confessor fulfills a paternal function: he reveals the heart of the Father and shows the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. He should keep in mind that he has been entrusted with the ministry of Christ, who mercifully accomplished the saving work of man's redemption and who is present by his power in the sacraments.[43]

d) As the minister of God the confessor comes to know the secrets of another's conscience, and he is bound to keep the sacramental seal of confession absolutely inviolate.

The Penitent

11. The acts of the penitent in the celebration of the sacrament are of the greatest importance.

When with proper dispositions he approaches this saving remedy instituted by Christ and confesses his sins, he shares by his actions in the

sacrament itself; the sacrament is completed when the words of absolution are spoken by the minister in the name of Christ.

Thus the faithful Christian, as he experiences and proclaims the mercy of God in his life, celebrates with the priest the liturgy by which the Church continually renews itself.

IV

THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

The Place of Celebration

12. The sacrament of penance is celebrated in the place and location prescribed by law.

The Time of Celebration

13. The reconciliation of penitents may be celebrated at any time on any day, but it is desirable that the faithful know the day and time at which the priest is available for this ministry. They should be encouraged to approach the sacrament of penance at times when Mass is not being celebrated and especially during the scheduled periods.[44]

The season of Lent is most appropriate for celebrating the sacrament of penance. Already on Ash Wednesday the people of God has heard the solemn invitation "Turn away from sin and believe the good news." It is therefore fitting to have several penitential celebrations during Lent, so that all the faithful may have an opportunity to be reconciled with God and their neighbour and so be able to celebrate the paschal mystery in the Easter triduum with renewed hearts.

Liturgical Vestments

14. The regulations laid down by the local Ordinaries for the use of liturgical vestments in the celebration of penance are to be observed.

A

RITE FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF INDIVIDUAL PENITENTS

Preparation of Priest and Penitent

15. Priest and penitent should first prepare themselves by prayer to celebrate the sacrament. The priest should call upon the Holy Spirit so that he may receive enlightenment and charity. The penitent should compare his life with the example and commandments of Christ and then pray to God for the forgiveness of his sins.

Welcoming the Penitent

16. The priest should welcome the penitent with fraternal charity and, if the occasion permits, address him with friendly words. The penitent then makes the sign of the cross, saying: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." The priest may also make the sign of the cross with the penitent. Next the priest briefly urges the penitent to have confidence in God. If the penitent is unknown to the priest, it is proper for him to indicate his state in life, the time of his last confession, his difficulties in leading the Christian life, and anything else which may help the confessor in exercising his ministry.

Reading the Word of God

17. Then the priest, or the penitent himself, may read a text of holy Scripture, or this may be done as part of the preparation for the sacrament. Through the word of God the Christian receives light to recognise his sins and is called to conversion and to confidence in God's mercy.

Confession of Sins and the Act of Penance

18. The penitent then confesses his sins, beginning, where customary, with a form of general confession: *I confess to almighty God.* If necessary, the priest should help the penitent to make a complete confession; he should also encourage him to have sincere sorrow for his sins against God. Finally, the priest should offer suitable counsel to help the penitent begin a new life and, where necessary, instruct him in the duties of the Christian way of life.

If the penitent has been the cause of harm or scandal to others, the priest should lead him to resolve that he will make appropriate restitution.

Then the priest imposes an act of penance or satisfaction on the penitent; this should serve not only to make up for the past but also to help him to begin a new life and provide him with an antidote to weakness. As far as possible, the penance should correspond to the seriousness and nature of the sins. This act of penance may suitably take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially service of one's neighbour and works of mercy. These will underline the fact that sin and its forgiveness have a social aspect.

The Prayer of the Penitent and the Absolution by the Priest

19. After this the penitent manifests his contrition and resolution to begin a new life by means of a prayer for God's pardon. It is desirable that this prayer should be based on the words of Scripture.

Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands, or at least his right hand, over the head of the penitent and pronounces the formula of absolution, in which the essential words are: "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." As he says the final words the priest makes the sign of the cross over the penitent. The form of absolution (see no. 46) indicates that the reconciliation of the penitent comes from the mercy of the Father; it shows the connection between the reconciliation of the sinner and the paschal mystery of Christ; it stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins; finally, it underlines the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament because reconciliation with God is asked for and given through the ministry of the Church.

Proclamation of Praise and Dismissal of the Penitent

20. After receiving pardon for his sins the penitent praises the mercy of God and gives him thanks in a short invocation taken from scripture. Then the priest tells him to go in peace.

The penitent continues his conversion and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God, for "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Short Rite

21. When pastoral need dictates it, the priest may omit or shorten some parts of the rite but must always retain in their entirety the confession of sins and the acceptance of the act of penance, the invitation to contrition (no. 44), and the form of absolution and the dismissal. In imminent danger of death, it is sufficient for the priest to say the essential words of the form of absolution, namely, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

B

RITE FOR RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

22. When a number of penitents assemble at the same time to receive sacramental reconciliation, it is fitting that they be prepared for the sacrament by a celebration of the word of God.

Those who will receive the sacrament at another time may also take part in the service.

Communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance. The faithful listen together to the word of God, which proclaims his mercy and invites them to conversion; at the same time they examine the conformity of their lives with that word of God and help each other through common prayer. After each person has confessed his sins and received absolution, all praise God together for his wonderful deeds on behalf of the people he has gained for himself through the blood of his Son.

If necessary, several priests should be available in suitable places to hear individual confessions and to reconcile the penitents.

Introductory Rites

23. When the faithful are assembled, a suitable hymn may be sung. Then the priest greets them, and, if necessary, he or another minister gives a brief introduction to the celebration and explains the order of service. Next he invites all to pray and after a period of silence completes the (opening) prayer.

The Celebration of the Word of God

24. The sacrament of penance should begin with a hearing of God's word, because through his word God calls men to repentance and leads them to a true conversion of heart.

One or more readings may be chosen. If more than one are read, a psalm, another suitable song, or a period of silence should be inserted between them, so that the word of God may be more deeply understood and heartfelt assent may be given to it. If there is only one reading, it is preferable that it be from the gospel.

Readings should be chosen which illustrate the following:

a) the voice of God calling men back to conversion and ever closer conformity with Christ;

b) the mystery of our reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Christ and through the gift of the Holy Spirit;

c) the judgment of God about good and evil in men's lives as a help in the examination of conscience.

25. The homily, taking its theme from the scriptural text, should lead the penitents to examine their consciences and to turn away from sin and toward God. It should remind the faithful that sin works against God, against the community and one's neighbours, and against the sinner himself. Therefore, it would be good to recall:

a) the infinite mercy of God, greater than all our sins, by which again and again he calls us back to himself;

b) the need for interior repentance, by which we are genuinely prepared to make reparation for sin;

c) the social aspect of grace and sin, by which the actions of individuals in some degree affect the whole body of the Church;

d) the duty to make satisfaction for sin, which is effective because of Christ's work of reparation and requires especially, in addition to works of penance, the exercise of true charity toward God and neighbour.

26. After the homily a suitable period of silence should be allowed for examining one's conscience and awakening true contrition for sin. The priest or a deacon or other minister may help the faithful with brief considerations or a litany, adapted to their background, age, etc.

If it is judged suitable, this communal examination of conscience and awakening of contrition may take the place of the homily. But in this case it should be clearly based on the text of scripture that has just been read.

The Rite of Reconciliation

27. At the invitation of the deacon or other minister, all kneel or bow their heads and say a form of general confession (for example, *I confess to almighty God*). Then they stand and join in a litany or suitable song to express confession of sins, heartfelt contrition, prayer for forgiveness, and trust in God's mercy. Finally, they say the Lord's Prayer, which is never omitted.

28. After the Lord's Prayer the priests go to the places assigned for confession. The penitents who desire to confess their sins go to the priest of their choice. After receiving a suitable act of penance, they are absolved by him with the form for the reconciliation of an individual penitent.

29. When the confessions are over, the priests return to the sanctuary. The priest who presides invites all to make an act of thanksgiving and to praise God for his mercy. This may be done in a psalm or hymn or litany. Finally, the priest concludes the celebration with prayer, praising God for the great love he has shown us.

Dismissal of the People

30. After the prayer of thanksgiving the priest blesses the faithful. Then the deacon or the priest himself dismisses the congregation.

C

RITE FOR RECONCILIATION OF PENITENTS WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The Discipline of General Absolution

31. Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession.

Particular, occasional circumstances may render it lawful and even necessary to give general absolution to a number of penitents without their previous individual confession.

In addition to cases involving danger of death, it is lawful to give sacramental absolution to several of the faithful at the same time, after they have made only a generic confession but have been suitably called to repentance, if there is grave need, namely when, in view of the number of penitents, sufficient confessors are not available to hear individual confessions properly within a suitable period of time, so that the penitents would, through no fault of their own, have to go without sacramental grace or holy communion for a long time. This may happen especially in mission territories but in other places as well and also in groups of persons when the need is established.

General absolution is not lawful, when confessors are available, for the sole reason of the large number of penitents, as may be on the occasion of some major feast or pilgrimage.[45]

32. The judgment about the presence of the above conditions and the decision concerning the lawfulness of giving general sacramental absolution are reserved to the bishop of the diocese, who is to consult with the other members of the episcopal conference.

Over and above the cases determined by the diocesan bishop, if any other serious need arises for giving sacramental absolution to several persons together, the priest must have recourse to the local Ordinary beforehand, when this is possible, if he is to give absolution lawfully. Otherwise, he should inform the Ordinary as soon as possible of the need and of the absolution which he gave.[46]

33. In order that the faithful may profit from sacramental absolution given to several persons at the same time, it is absolutely necessary that they be properly disposed. Each one should be sorry for his sins and resolve to avoid committing them again. He should intend to repair any scandal and harm he may have caused and likewise resolve to confess in

due time each one of the grave sins which he cannot confess at present. These dispositions and conditions, which are required for the validity of the sacrament, should be carefully recalled to the faithful by priests.[47]

34. Those who receive pardon for grave sins by a common absolution should go to individual confession before they receive this kind of absolution again, unless they are impeded by a just reason. They are strictly bound, unless this is morally impossible, to go to confession within a year. The precept which obliges each of the faithful to confess at least once a year to a priest all the grave sins which he has not individually confessed before also remains in force in this case too.[48]

The Rite of General Absolution

35. For the reconciliation of penitents by general confession and absolution in the cases provided by law, everything takes place as described above for the reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution, with the following exceptions:

a) After the homily or during it, the faithful who seek general absolution should be instructed to dispose themselves properly, that is, each one should be sorry for his sins and resolve to avoid committing them again. He should intend to repair any scandal and harm he may have caused and likewise resolve to confess in due time each one of the grave sins which cannot be confessed at present.[49] Some act of penance should be proposed for all; individuals may add to this penance if they wish.

b) The deacon, another minister, or the priest then calls upon the penitents who wish to receive absolution to show their intention by some sign (for example, by bowing their heads, kneeling, or giving some other sign determined by the episcopal conferences). They should also say together a form of general confession (for example, *I confess to almighty God*), which may be followed by a litany or a penitential song. Then the Lord's Prayer is sung or said by all, as indicated in no. 27, above.

c) Then the priest calls upon the grace of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, proclaims the victory over sin of Christ's death and resurrection, and gives sacramental absolution to the penitents.

d) Finally, the priest invites the people to give thanks, as described in no. 29, above, and, omitting the concluding prayer, he immediately blesses and dismisses them.

V

PENITENTIAL CELEBRATIONS

Nature and Structure

36. Penitential celebrations are gatherings of the people of God to hear the proclamation of God's word. This invites them to conversion and renewal of life and announces our freedom from sin through the death and resurrection of Christ. The structure of these services is the same as that usually followed in celebrations of the word of God[50] and given in the *Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents.*

It is appropriate, therefore, that after the introductory rites (song, greeting, and prayer) one or more biblical readings be chosen with songs, psalms, or periods of silence inserted between them. In the homily these readings should be explained and applied to the congregation. Before or after the readings from scripture, readings from the Fathers or other writers may be selected which will help the community and each person to a true awareness of sin and heartfelt sorrow, in other words, to bring about conversion of life.

After the homily and reflection on God's word, it is desirable that the congregation, united in voice and spirit, pray together in a litany or in some other way suited to general participation. At the end the Lord's Prayer is said, asking God our Father "to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us . . . and deliver us from evil." The priest or the minister who presides concludes with a prayer and the dismissal of the people.

Benefit and Importance

37. Care should be taken that the faithful do not confuse these celebrations with the celebration of the sacrament of penance.[51] Penitential celebrations are very helpful in promoting conversion of life and purification of heart.[52]

It is desirable to arrange such services especially for these purposes:

– to foster the spirit of penance within the Christian community;

– to help the faithful to prepare for confession which can be made individually later at a convenient time;

– to help children gradually to form their conscience about sin in human life and about freedom from sin through Christ;

– to help catechumens during their conversion.

Penitential celebrations, moreover, are very useful in places where no priest is available to give sacramental absolution. They offer help in

reaching that perfect contrition which comes from charity and enables the faithful to attain to God's grace through a desire for the sacrament of penance.[53]

VI

ADAPTATIONS OF THE RITE TO VARIOUS REGIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Adaptations by the Episcopal Conferences

38. In preparing particular rituals episcopal conferences may adapt the rite of penance to the needs of individual regions so that after confirmation by the Apostolic See the rituals may be used in the respective regions. It is the responsibility of episcopal conferences in this matter:

a) to establish regulations for the discipline of the sacrament of penance, particularly those affecting the ministry of priests and the reservation of sins;

b) to determine more precise regulations about the place proper for the ordinary celebration of the sacrament of penance and about the signs of penance to be shown by the faithful before general absolution (see no. 35, above);

c) to prepare translations of texts adapted to the character and language of each people and also to compose new texts for the prayers of the faithful and the minister, keeping intact the sacramental form.

The Competence of the Bishop

39. It is for the diocesan bishop:

a) to regulate the discipline of penance in his diocese,[54] including adaptations of the rite according to the rules proposed by the episcopal conference;

b) to determine, after consultation with the other members of the episcopal conference, when general sacramental absolution may be permitted under the conditions laid down by the Holy See.[55]

Adaptations by the Minister

40. It is for priests, and especially parish priests:

a) in reconciling individuals or the community, to adapt the rite to the concrete circumstances of the penitents. The essential structure

and the entire form of absolution must be kept, but if necessary they may omit some parts for pastoral reasons or enlarge upon them, may select the texts of readings or prayers, and may choose a place more suitable for the celebration according to the regulations of the episcopal conference, so that the entire celebration may be rich and fruitful;

b) to propose and prepare occasional penitential celebrations during the year, especially in Lent. In order that the texts chosen and the order of the celebration may be adapted to the conditions and circumstances of the community or group (for example, children, sick persons, etc.), they may be assisted by others, including the laity;

c) to decide to give general sacramental absolution preceded by only a generic confession, when a grave necessity not foreseen by the diocesan bishop arises and when recourse to him is not possible. They are obliged to notify the Ordinary as soon as possible of the need and of the fact that absolution was given.

NOTES

1. See 2 Corinthians 5:18ff; Colossians 1:20.
2. See John 8:34-36.
3. See 1 Peter 2:9.
4. See Luke 15.
5. Luke 5:20, 27-32; 7:48.
6. See Matthew 9:2-8.
7. See Romans 4:25.
8. See Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer III.
9. See Matthew 26:28.
10. See John 20:19-23.
11. See Luke 24:47.
12. See Acts 3:19, 26; 17:30.
13. See Romans 6:4-10.
14. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer III.
15. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer II.
16. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, Chapter I: Denz.-Schon. 1668 and 1670; can. 1: Denz.-Schon. 1701.
17. St Ambrose, Letter 41:12: *PL* 16, 1116.
18. See Revelation 19:7.
19. See Ephesians 1:22-23; Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 7: *AAS* 57 (1965) 9-11.
20. Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 8: *ibid.*, 12.
21. See 1 Peter 4:13.
22. See 1 Peter 4:8.

23. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae: Denz.-Schon. 1638, 1740, 1943; Congregation of Rites, instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, May 25, 1967, no. 35: *AAS* 59 (1967) 560-561; Roman Missal, *General Instruction*, nos. 29, 30, 56 a. b. g.
24. Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 11: *AAS* 57 (1965) 15-16.
25. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini*, February 17, 1966: *AAS* 58 (1966) 179; See Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 11: *AAS* 57 (1965) 15-16.
26. See Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25.
27. See Titus 3:6.
28. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, January 1, 1967, no. 4: *AAS* 59 (1967) 9; see Pius XII, encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943: *AAS* 35 (1943) 213.
29. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, Chapter I: Denz.-Schon. 1673-1675.
30. *Ibid.*, Chapter 4: Denz.-Schon. 1676.
31. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini*, February 17, 1966: *AAS* 58 (1966) 179.
32. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, Chapter 5: Denz.-Schon. 1679.
33. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, Chapter 8: Denz.-Schon. 1690-1692; Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, January 1, 1967, nos. 2-3: *AAS* 59 (1967) 6-8.
34. See Titus 3:4-5.
35. See Luke 15:7, 10, 32.
36. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, can. 7-8: Denz.-Schon. 1707-1708.
37. See 2 Corinthians 4:10.
38. See Galatians 4:31.
39. See Matthew 18:18; John 20:23.
40. See Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 26: *AAS* 57 (1965) 31-32.
41. See Philippians 1:9-10.
42. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*, June 16, 1972, No. XII: *AAS* 64 (1972) 514.
43. See Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7: *AAS* 56 (1964) 100-101.
44. See Congregation of Rites, instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, May 25, 1967, no. 35: *AAS* 59 (1967) 560-561.
45. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*, June 16, 1972, no. III: *AAS* 64 (1972) 511.
46. *Ibid.*, no. V: *loc. cit.*, 512.
47. *Ibid.*, nos. VI and XI: *loc. cit.*, 512, 514.
48. *Ibid.*, nos. VII and VIII: *loc. cit.*, 512-513.
49. See *Ibid.*, no. VI: *loc. cit.*, 512.
50. See Congregation of Rites, instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, September 26, 1964, nos. 37-39: *AAS* 56 (1964) 110-111.
51. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*, June 16, 1972, no. X: *AAS* 64 (1972) 513-514.
52. *Ibid.*
53. See Council of Trent, Session XIV, De sacramento Paenitentiae, chapter 5: Denz.-Schon. 1677.
54. See Second Vatican Council, constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 26: *AAS* 57 (1965) 31-32.
55. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*, no. V: *AAS* 64 (1972) 512.

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